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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Georg Rudolf Weckherlin, The Embodiment of a Transitional Stage in German Metrics. By AARON SCHAFFER. (Hesperia.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1918.

The title of this study is not quite comprehensive enough, since the whole first half of the slender volume is devoted to a summary of the development of German metrics from earliest times down to Weckherlin. Of course such "running starts" are necessary in almost any historical study, especially in one which is dealing, as this one does, with a particular stage in a *development*. One wonders, however, if Mr. Schaffer's work would not have been unified and strengthened if he had condensed very considerably this first half and referred us to Saran and his other sources for particulars.

The "transitional stage" of the title refers to the progression from the *irregularly alternating* technique of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to the *regularly alternating-accentuating* technique of the seventeenth century. It is the going over from the metrical practices of the "short rhyme-pair," as in the earlier native didactic poetry—practices which allowed many accentual "conflicts"—to those of the later foreign-influenced Renaissance poetry, where such "conflicts" were decidedly taboo.

Wherein Weckherlin is the "embodiment" of this transitional stage becomes clear if we peruse the second half of Mr. Schaffer's study. His argument is somewhat as follows: On examining Weckherlin's early verse it is found that he "consistently employed the irregularly alternating technique of the 'kurze Reimpaare.'" This technique appears in such verses as:

Der sternen gëwöhnlichen dantz.

Three decades later the poet revised, for a new edition, many of these earlier poems, and in doing so removed a large number of the accentual "conflicts" and thus left the verses in question comparatively smooth. The verse I have cited above, for instance, appears in the revised edition of 1648 as:

Der sternen wunderreichen dantz.

It is thus, in his progress from sixteenth-century practices toward the Opitzian standards in metrical technique, that he is looked upon by the author as an embodiment of the transitional period.

Thus far Mr Schaffer has emphasized a point which has been recognized, though less clearly, by students of Weckherlin's technique and of that of his period. But in one other point the author's work has yielded an even

more distinct contribution. Weckherlin did not, in revising his earlier poems, remove all the apparent accentual conflicts. Schaffer contends, however, that the poet removed the serious ones, and that the remaining conflicts become much less violent, in fact quite justifiable, when correctly read. To the aid of their correct interpretation he summons the rhythmic principles of "hovering" and "secondary" accent. Hovering accent relieves, the author believes with Franz Saran, the apparent conflict in series of "syllables possessing equal, or almost equal, duration and stress." And how? By distributing the stress "evenly over the entire group of words, with the syllables in [metrical] arsis [position] receiving the emphasis [or heft?] and those in thesis the higher pitch; in this way the verse receives a slower movement which makes possible the smoothing out of any apparent accentual conflict." This principle applies to, and is instrumental, the author contends, in the smoothing out of, such verses as the iambic:

Berg, thâl, feld ûnd wald widerhallen.

Further and more important relief in the case of apparent conflict between rhythmical and metrical accent is offered by what the author calls an extension of the principle of "secondary accent" as announced by Professor Bright. That is, Mr Schaffer would extend the principle which would normally give, in such verses as,

Thy terriblè hushed laughter, stranger still,

to the *-ble* a thetic value; so as to cover also those instances even where there is no intervening light syllable between primary and secondary accent. In such verses therefore as,

Hat euch als ihr kunst-stück erdacht,

the syllable *-stück*, which has in prose normally simply a secondary accent, is quite usable in a thesis position. That is, if we are careful to give to *kunst* the higher pitch (as also in the case of hovering accent) and to *-stück* the metrical heft. Thus far and even farther the author carries the application of the principle of secondary accent, and with success. I feel, however, that he extends it too far when he applies it to relieve such *Versungetüme* as,

Abèr disè süssè gothèit,

in which the inflectional endings *-se* are deemed worthy of appearing in a thesis position. It is hard for me to believe that this verse is "by no means harsh sounding." A critic may be warranted in going great lengths in interpreting sympathetically, and in strengthening thereby, the apparently weak spots in the technique of a great poet. Weckherlin would however hardly come into this category.

Nevertheless Mr Schaffer has, I feel, thrown his weight in the right scale. He has sided in the main with Saran and other recent students of

real rhythmic phenomena—students who are sometimes called “metrical anarchists”—and against those who fail to use their ears, and to whom the rigid *metric scheme* of verse is the tyrannical alpha and omega. And he has thus helped to throw light where the elder metrists have left us in darkness.

One thing, however, I wish the author had omitted—the attempt, even though a modest one (in his short treatment of Weckherlin’s position in German literature), to magnify the poet’s literary importance. How can a *Fürstenknecht*, one who aped the frills of foreign verse and completely neglected all that was *volkstümlich* in his native art, one who tried to introduce the exotic sonnet, elegy, and ode and even helped Marinism into Germany—the agonizing Germany of the Thirty Years’ War—how can such a one be looked on as anything but a detractor? How can we construe his work as a “contribution,” in any sense, to the racial poetic wealth? If such standards of contribution had prevailed, there would have been indeed no room in German art for the Heines, the Schuberts, and the Wagners.

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